



Background and history

State Shoreline Master Program (SMP) Guidelines are standards which local government must follow in drafting their master program. The Guidelines translate the broad policies of RCW 90.58.020 into standards for regulation of shoreline uses. The state legislature directed Ecology in 1995 to update the state's guidelines, which had not been revised since 1972 and were showing their age. The department proposed a first draft in 1999 and eventually adopted a substantially revised draft in 2000 that was challenged in court.

Then-Governor Gary Locke and former Attorney General Christine Gregoire cosponsored a year-long mediation effort in 2002 that culminated in a third draft, which was issued for public comment in July 2002. That proposal had the endorsement of the Association of Washington Business (representing a coalition of business organizations, cities and counties), the Washington Aggregates & Concrete Association, the Washington Environmental Council (WEC) and other environmental organizations – all of whom were parties to the lawsuit.

Ecology received about 300 comments on the version proposed in 2003. Seventeen changes were made in response to those comments, to clarify language and to delete obsolete or duplicative references. The final version was adopted December 17, 2003.



What is a Shoreline Master Program?

Master programs are defined in the Shoreline Management Act as: ". . .the comprehensive use plan for a described area, and the use regulations together with maps, diagrams, charts, or other descriptive material and text, a statement of desired goals, and standards..." [RCW 90.58.030(3)(a)]

Every SMP is somewhat unique, and many newer SMPs are integrated to some degree into local comprehensive plans and development regulations. However, most SMPs usually include the following:

1. **Introduction** information on the relationship of the SMP to other regulatory programs, description of the legal framework and applicability of the SMP, and orientation on how to use the document.
2. **Goals** that serve as broad expressions of community desires relative to SMP "elements": shoreline use, economic development, public access, circulation, recreation, conservation and historical/cultural values. Goals provide the basis for, and are intended to help implement, SMP policies and regulations. The shoreline elements are required by the SMA at [RCW 90.58.100\(2\)](#).
3. **General policies and regulations** that apply to shoreline uses and modification activities irrespective of environment designations. Policies are the bridge between goals and regulations, translating the general into the specific. Shoreline policies are legally enforceable. Regulations are more specific, enforceable controls and standards for shoreline development.
4. **Policies and regulations for shoreline uses** such as agriculture, aquaculture, mining, commercial, industrial, recreation and boating facilities. A shoreline "use" is defined as the "end" to which a land or water area is ultimately employed. Regulations in SMPs are often referred to as "use requirements."
5. **Policies and regulations for shoreline modification activities** including dredging, piers, construction of bulkheads, and other actions undertaken in preparation for, or in support of, a shoreline use. Regulations for shoreline modification activities generally deal with construction impacts whereas "use" regulations pertain to long term management as well.
6. **Environment designations:** shorelines are classified into specific "environment designations" based on their physical, biological and development characteristics. Historically, SMPs have used primarily four basic environment designations ("natural", "conservancy", "rural" and "urban"). New state guidelines recommend six designations: "natural," "rural-conservancy," "urban conservancy," "high-intensity," "shoreline residential," and "aquatic." Local governments may modify state recommended classifications to better accommodate shoreline areas with unique characteristics. Policies and regulations are developed for each designation, reflecting the specific purpose and intent of each environment and responding to its specific conditions.
7. **Administrative regulations** for permit and enforcement, and for making amendments to the shoreline master program.
8. **Technical appendices** such as maps of the environment designations and boundary descriptions for environment designations are usually incorporated into SMPs.